

*A Global History of War: From Assyria to the Twenty-First Century*. Gérard Chaliand. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780520283619

The title of Gérard Chaliand's book, *A Global History of War*, promises more than the book offers. The book does not examine warfare around the globe, nor does it explore how warfare took shape within an interconnected world. Rather, the book sets itself the more modest goal of surveying the military histories and strategies of a succession of Eurasian states, beginning with the Assyrian empire in the twelfth century C.E. and ending with sixteenth century Russia. It is only in the last four chapters of the book—dedicated to European colonialism, nationalist revolutions, guerilla warfare, and asymmetrical warfare—that Chaliand shifts from a state-based perspective to a consideration of global developments. The book has little to offer readers looking for an integrated global history of warfare but it does offer a window onto the myriad ways in which states, particularly multi-ethnic imperial states, have coped with their geographical vulnerabilities.

Chaliand begins the first chapter of the book by asking whether it is possible to “characterize the strategies that defined war on the Eurasian continent ... over the long period from the fifth century B.C.E. to the fifteenth century C.E.” (4). The answer conveyed by this chapter is a resounding ‘no.’ If all states in Eurasian history were confronted with problems of geographical vulnerability, the chapter makes it clear that they relied on vastly different strategies, tactics, modes of warfare, technologies, and methods of mobilization to confront these problems.

Chapters 2 to 14, organized in roughly chronological order, illustrate these differences. These chapters include lengthy analyses of the Byzantine Empire and the Eurasian nomads and much shorter overviews of the Assyrian, Mongol, Timurid, Mughal, and Qing empires. Each chapter considers one state's military successes and failures within its particular geographical context. Attention is given to the role played by strategic culture, military organization and tactics, and advances in military technology. In several chapters, Chaliand includes lengthy excerpts from primary sources pertaining to strategic history.

Chaliand has chosen to emphasize the distinctive features of various Eurasian states rather than exploring patterns of interaction or their embeddedness in larger global developments. However, this is not to say that the book is entirely silent on these larger developments. A recurring theme in the first fourteen chapters of the book is the unfolding relationship between nomadic and sedentary populations. This theme provides a loose interpretive structure for the history of a number of individual empires and Eurasia as a whole. In his chapters on China, for instance, Chaliand relies on the narrative of acculturation. Nomadic conquerors are gradually assimilated into the culture of their sedentary subjects, becoming "sinicized." In China, as elsewhere, Chaliand asserts, "sedentary populations always prevailed" (116). Chaliand goes on to argue that the threat of nomadic populations was an obstacle more generally to the emergence of Europe as a global military power. The ascent of Europe, he claims in Chapter 16, was marked by the decline of nomadic powers and the shift in "geopolitical fulcrum" from the steppes to the seas (202).

The last four chapters of the book shift from a single state-based analytical framework to a thematic exploration of ideologies and geostrategic developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Chapter 15, "The Ascent of Europe," Chaliand considers some of the reasons for Europe's rise to

power in Eurasia. His account hews closely to a narrative of European exceptionalism, emphasizing developments in technology, political systems, and intellectual culture. He does not take into account the work of global historians such as Kenneth Pomeranz, for whom the rise of Europe is less a natural evolution than a series of historical contingencies. In Chapter 16, “The Time of Revolutions,” the main actors are not Eurasians but colonized peoples of Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Chaliand focuses on nationalisms inspired by encounter with European powers. In contrast to earlier chapters in the book, he pays no attention to indigenous traditions or geostrategic preferences predating the colonial period. Chapter 17, on guerilla warfare, fits awkwardly into the book. It does not provide a historical narrative but rather describes the nature of guerilla warfare with examples drawn from around the world. Chapter 18 very briefly considers the recent emergence of a unipolar world in which the dominant power, the United States, has proven ill-equipped to cope with the complexity of war in the Middle East.

The book, despite the breadth of its coverage, is difficult to recommend for either a specialist or non-specialist audience. For specialists, the discussion will appear dated. Chaliand’s discussion of Chinese history, for instance, make no mention of the fact that the “sinicization” paradigm has been abandoned or heavily criticized by most scholars of Chinese history. Non-specialists and students of the history of war will be frustrated by the near absence of citations. While a specialist can discern some of the sources for Chaliand’s arguments, these are not made explicit, making the book of little use as a springboard for deeper exploration.

The book is poorly edited, surprising for a work coming from a major university press. The chapters in the book are uneven in length and style. Many chapters are no more than five or six pages in length. Others, such as the chapter on the Byzantine Empire, are nearly fifty pages. Several chapters include lengthy excerpts from primary sources while others provide only a brief

historical overview of important battles. Chaliand offers no explanation for the uneven treatment of different Eurasian states. Is it because of their relative importance, the availability of sources, or his own interest? Other editorial issues abound. The transliterations of Chinese are inconsistent—combining Wade-Giles and pinyin Romanization—and filled with errors. The emperor Kang-hsi (or Kangxi) is written as Kang-his, Luoyang is misspelled as Louyang.

Despite these shortcomings, the book is not without value as a teaching resource. The primary sources that Chaliand includes in the text could be particularly useful for a course on the history of war. These include Byzantine treatises on military strategy, accounts of battle in the Crusades, and analyses of Ottoman warfare. Many are fascinating reading if inadequately integrated into his analysis.

In sum, the book offers episodes in Eurasian military history rather than an integrated global history of war. The title of the book does, however, raise the question of what a truly global history of war would look like. Should a global history of war simply be an attempt to survey as many wars as possible? Must it be structured around the histories of individual states? Or, is there some way in which the changing nature of war over time might be integrated into the patterns of an unfolding global history?

James Bonk, College of Wooster, Chinese Studies and East Asian Studies